

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4172

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 4 TUNIS 0224

DEPT PASS CAIRO AND POUCH SANAA

BEIRUT PASS DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: ANNOUNCEMENT OF TUNISIAN-LIBYAN UNITY

REF: TUNIS 204

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1. SUMMARY OF FOREGOING PROVIDED IN REFTEL. FOLLOWING REPRESENTS DETAILED ANALYSIS ON WHICH SUMMARY BASED.

1A. BOURGUIBA-QADHAFI MEETING: WHOSE INITIATIVE? AS REPORTED IN TUNIS 6735, MASMOUDI ON RETURN FROM VISIT TO LIBYA AFTER ARAB SUMMIT ON NOVEMBER 26-28, 1973 SAID IN ADDITION TO SUMMIT RESULTS HE HAD DISCUSSED "BILATERAL" MATTERS AND HE EXPRESSED HOPE THAT TUNISIAN-LIBYAN CONTACTS WOULD CONTINUE, NOTING THEY "MIGHT BE CROWNED BY A SUMMIT MEETING". ASIDE FROM TELEPHONE CALL BETWEEN BOURGUIBA AND QADHAFI THAT FORMER MENTIONED IN PARIS PRESS STATEMENT ON OIL FOR EUROPE, ONLY OTHER KNOWN SPECIAL CONTACT BETWEEN TUNISIAN AND LIBYA IMMEDIATELY PRIOR JERBA MEETING WAS TECHNICAL MISSION OF LIBYAN MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN FRAMEWORK OF MIXED COMMISSIONS. THERE IS NO INDICATION THIS MISSION IN ANY WAY RELATED TO MERGER MEETING. AS REPORTED IN TUNIS 76, MASMOUDI ON JAN 4, I.E., ONLY ONE WEEK BEFORE HISTORIC MEETING, TOLD ME QADHAFI WAS BITTER AND DISILLUSIONED WITH EGYPTIANS BUT HE WAS STILL INTERESTED IN UNION WITH TUNISIA AND MIGHT RESIGN IF UNION WITH TUNISIA COULD BE FORMED. MASMOUDI SAID SOME FORMULA FOR UNION SHOULD BE FOUND FOR THE FUTURE BUT HE CONVEYED IMPRESSION HE UNDERSTOOD FULL UNION WAS NOT POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME. HE ADDED THAT, ABOVE ALL, TUNISIA SHOULD NOT ABANDON QADHAFI NOW THAT HE IS SO DISENCHANTED WITH EGYPTIANS. HE MADE NO ALLUSION TO CONTACT IN NEAR FUTURE BETWEEN QADHAFI AND BOURGUIBA AND, IN FACT, AS REPORTED IN TUNIS 0053, HE SAID BOURGUIBA WAS TIRED AND NEEDED REST AND HAD ADVANCED HIS DEPARTURE TO GENEVA TO JAN 15 AS OPPOSED TO ORIGINAL SCHEDULE OF END OF JANUARY. TO OUR KNOWLEDGE, THIS WAS AS MUCH AS MASMOUDI CONFIDED TO ANY FOREIGN DIPLOMAT HERE, INCLUDING FRENCH, ON POSSIBILITY OF MERGER MEETING. FEW TUNISIANS SEEM TO HAVE HAD ANY HINT THAT MERGER MEETING WAS LIKELY IN NEAR FUTURE.

1.B. QUESTION IS, WHEN DID MASMOUDI AND BOURGUIBA DECIDE ON MEETING, AND AT WHOSE INITIATIVE? AS POINTED OUT TUNIS 191, FOREIGN MINISTER'S CHEF DE CABINET HASSEN
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FODHA TOLD ME THAT QADHAFI CALLED BOURGUIBA SUDDENLY NIGHT OF JAN 10, REQUESTING URGENT MEETING. HOWEVER, ITALIAN AMBASSADOR MENTIONED THAT MASMOUDI HAD INDICATED AT PRESIDENT'S NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION JAN 7 THAT QADHAFI WOULD BE COMING SOON. QUESTION ARISES WHETHER MEETING PLANNED BEFORE JAN 10, AND IF SO, IF BOURGUIBA KNEW ABOUT IT BEFORE JAN 10. DURING MY MEETING FODHA GAVE NO INDICATION THAT UNION AGREEMENT WAS IN OFFING

(HE PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW). ALL INFORMATION TO DATE WOULD INDICATE ACTUAL DECISION ON TIMING OF MEETING AND PHRASING OF COMMUNIQUE WAS DONE WITH LITTLE ADVANCE NOTICE. THIS IS HARDLY FIRST TIME QADHAFI HAS MADE SURPRISE VISIT TO NEIGHBORING COUNTRY. WHETHER HE AND MASMOUDI HAD PLANNED FOR JERBA MEETING TO COINCIDE WITH PM NOURIRA'S ABSENCE FOR LONG-PLANNED VISIT TO IRAN CAN ONLY BE CONJECTURED. IMPORTANT QUESTION IS: WAS NOURIRA INFORMED THAT MEETING WAS BEING PLANNED BEFORE HE LEFT FOR IRAN? IF SO, DID HE THINK IT WAS TO DISCUSS INTERNATIONAL QUESTIONS AND FINANCIAL MATTERS RATHER THAN POSSIBILITY OF UNION? SHOULD NOTE THAT MINFIN FITOURI, WHO ACCOMPANIED MASMOUDI TO JERBA, IS CLOSE CONFIDANT OF NOURIRA. HIS PRESENCE AND THAT OF HASSAN BELKHODJA, PRESIDENT OF STATE BANK, GAVE IMPRESSION MEETING WAS TO DISCUSS FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC QUESTIONS. CURRENT SPECULATION IS THAT, OUTSIDE OF MINISTERS AND CLOSE CONFIDANTS WHO ACCOMPANIED BOURGUIBA TO JERBA, FEW IF ANY TUNISIANS KNEW PURPOSE OF MEETING. MOST SIGNIFICANT AND STILL UNANSWERED QUESTION IS : DID BOURGUIBA KNOW WHAT WAS BEING PROPOSED FOR HIS SIGNATURE BEFORE HE ACTUALLY MET WITH QADHAFI? OR HAD HE DISCUSSED IT WITH ANYONE EXCEPT HIS SMALL, TIGHTLY-LINKED COTERIE WHO ACCOMPANIED HIM? ANSWER TO THIS IS NOT KNOWN, BUT IT MAY COME OUT IN COMING DAYS OR WEEKS.

2. BACKGROUND FOR MEETING. OVER PAST TWO YEARS MASMOUDI HAS BEEN FREQUENT VISITOR TO TRIPOLI AND HAS TAKEN ON ROLE OF QADHAFI'S FRIEND IN COURT. IT WAS HE WHO PERSUADED BOURGUIBA TO RECEIVE QADHAFI IN TUNIS IN DECEMBER 1972, AND EVER SINCE THEN -- DESPITE FAMOUS CONFRONTATION AT PALMARIUM -- TUNISIA AND LIBYA HAVE BEEN GOING THROUGH MOTIONS OF DRAWING CLOSER TOGETHER.

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IN ADDITION TO QUARTERLY MEETINGS OF HIGH-LEVEL

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED CAIRO.

NOTE: TUNIS 224, SECTION 1 OF 4 POUCHED SANAA.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 4 TUNIS 0224

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COMMISSIONS AT PM LEVEL, VARIOUS JOINT COMMISSIONS
AND STUDY GROUPS MET REGULARLY.(8, FIST SIX MONTHS
OF 1973 WE HAVE RECORD OF 17 SUCH MEETINGS. MEETINGS
CONTINUED IN SECOND HALF OF YEAR, BUT AT MUCH REDUCED
PACE DUE IN PART TO PROPOSED LIBYA-EGYPTIAN MERGER

AND RAMADAN WAR. IN ADDITION, AT LEAST SIX SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS HAVE BEEN SIGNED BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIES IN SUCH FIELDS AS ESTABLISHMENT OF JOINT BANK, JOINT SEA TRANSPORT COMPANY, SITUATION OF TUNISIAN WORKERS IN LIBYA, EXCHANGE OF TECHNICIANS AND VARIOUS JOINT ECONOMIC PROJECTS. UNDER OVERALL SUPERVISION OF PM NOUIRA, COMMITTEES WENT ABOUT TASKS SLOWLY AND METHODICALLY. IN SHARP CONTRAST, THE MEETING BETWEEN BOURGUIBA AND QADHAFI SHOWED LACK OF ADVANCE PLANNING AND SHOT-GUN ANNOUNCEMENT DEPARTED FROM BOURGUIBA'S POLICY OF GRADUALISM. SCHEDULING OF REFERENDUM SO SOON AFTER MEETING ALSO REPRESENTS DEPARTURE FROM TRADITIONAL BOURGUIBA POLICY AND IS MUCH MORE REMINISCENT OF IMPROVISATION WHICH CHARACTERIZED GOMAL DURING AHMED BEN SALAH PERIOD, PARTICULARLY ITS LATTER DAYS.

2A. YET IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT BOURGUIBA HAD JUST TAKEN STEPS TO MEND HIS STRAINED RELATIONS WITH KING HASSAN OF MOROCCO. THE TIMING OF THIS ACTION WOULD INDICATE IT MAY HAVE BEEN DONE IN PREPARATION FOR THE MEETING WITH QADHAFI. IN FACT, MASMOUDI ALLUDED TO THIS IN INTERVIEW HE GAVE TO LE MONDE ON JAN 13 IN WHICH HE TRIED DOWNPLAY "SURPRISE" NATURE OF THIS AGREEMENT. IN ADDITION, MASMOUDI TOLD ITALIANS RECENTLY THAT GOMAL WORKING TOWARD ALGERIAN-TUNISIAN-LIBYA UNITY. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT WHEN BOURGUIBA STOPPED OFF IN ALGERIA ON WAY BACK FROM AFRICAN TRIP HE TRIED TO TALK BOUMEDIENE INTO JOINING UNION. AND IMPORTANT FACTOR IS THAT TUNISIA'S RELATIONS WITH EGYPT, LIKE THOSE OF LIBYA, HAVE BEEN COOL OWING APPARENTLY TO RIFT BETWEEN BOURGUIBA AND PRESIDENT SADAT. LATTER, PERHAPS PIQUED BY BOURGUIBA STATEMENTS DURING AND AFTER OCTOBER WAR, REPORTEDLY SNUBBED BOURGUIBA AT ALGIERS SUMMIT. IT WAS NOTED BY TV VIEWERS HERE THAT SADAT WAS PRESENT FOR ONLY LAST FEW MINUTES OF BOURGUIBA SPEECH IN ALGIERS. BOURGUIBA, IN TURN, WAS UPSET OVER EGYPTIAN (SADAT) RECEPTION ACCORDED TO BAHJI LADJHAM AS REPORTED

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IN THIS 6864. BOURGUIBA, RECOGNIZING QADHAFI WAS DISILLUSIONED BY FAILURE MOVE TOWARD UNITY WITH EGYPT, MAY HAVE BEEN IN PART INSPIRED TO MOVE CLOSER TOWARD QADHAIF AND LIBYA AT THIS TIME BY HIS OWN DISAGREEMENT OR PIQUE WITH SADAT. HE AND HIS ADVISORS ABOVE ALL MAY HAVE DECIDED TO APPROACH QADHAFI WHEN LATTER HAD LEAST BARGAINING POWER, I.E., SERIES OF UNSUCCESSFUL VENTURES AND SENSE OF ISOLATION AND FRUSTRATION OVER MIDDLE EAST EVENTS.

3. THE MEETING AND ITS RESULTS. ACCORDING TO PRESS, BOURGUIBA AND QADHAFI HAD A HALF-HOUR FACE-TO-FACE

MEETING, PRESUMABLY ALONE, AFTER WHICH THEY WERE JOINTED BY MASMOUDI, MINIT TAHAR BELKHODJA, DEPTUY TO PM MOHAMED SAYAH, FITOURI AND HASSAN BELKHODJA ON TUNISIAN SIDE AND COMMANDANTS MUSTAPHA KHAROU LI AND MKHTAR KAROU I OF RCC. MEETING LSTER ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES BEFORE BREAKING FOR LUNCH FOLLOWED BY POETRY RECITAL. IN INTERVAL RADIO REPEATED ANNOUNCEMENT THAT IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD BE MADE AT 4PM. MEETING RESUMED AT 4:10PM, AT WHICH POINT MASMOUDI READ BRIEF JOINT UNITY PROCLAMATION WHICH TWO PRESIDENTS SIGNED. PROCLAMTION IN ESSENCE SAYS THAT BOURGUIBA AND QADHAFI "PROCLAIM" UNION ON THE BASIS OF CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES IN EFFECT IN EACH COUNTRY. THE TWO COUNTRIES ARE TO COMPRISE A SINGLE REPUBLIC WHICH WILL BE KNOWN AS ARAB ISLAMIC REPUBLIC (AIR). THIS REPUBLIC WILL HAVE ONE CONSTITUTION, ONE FLAT, ONE PRESIDENT, ONE ARMY AND SAME LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIARY POWERS. PROCLAMATION STATES REFERENDUM WILL BE "ORGANIZED TO THIS EFFECT IN 18 JANUARY 1974" (SIC).

3A. MASMOUDI GAVE BRIEF STATEMENT TO LIBYAN PRESS AGENCY LATER SAME DAY EXPRESSING HOPE THIS WOULD BE FIRST LINK IN CHAIN OF TOTAL ARAB UNITY AND WOULD BE INSPIRATION TO YOUNG GENERATIONS, FORCING ENEMY TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF "US" AND REGARD "US" WITH NEW EYE. HE SAID LEADERS AND PEOPLE OF TWO COUNTRIES HAD CHARACTERISTICS THAT WOULD FAVOR CONSOLIDATION AND EXPANSION TO INCLUDE COUNTRIES OF MAGHREB AND MACHREK. BOURGUIBA IN BRIEF STATEMENT AT AIRPORT ON RETURN TUNIS PUT ACCENT ON FACT THAT AIR IS DESTINED TO HAVE CONSIDERABLE WEIGHT BECAUSE OF EXPERIENCE
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AND HUMAN AND MATERIAL RE-SOURCES IN POSSESSE. HE SAID IF PROCEDURE REQUIRED POSTPONEMENT OF REFERENDU., IT COULD TAKE PLACE ON MARCH 20, WHICH IS TUNISIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY. SHOULD BE NOTED TUNISIA HAS NO REFERENDUM PROCEUDURE IN CONSTITUTION OR LAWS. THIS WAS PROBLEM FOLLOWING BE
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O 141800Z JAN 74

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 4 TUNIS 0224

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NOT EXIST, IT WAS DECIDED TO HOLD POPULAR CON-
STULTATIONS INSTEAD. ARABIC TERN (ISTISHARA) IS USED
HERE TO MEAN EITHER, HOWEVER, IN LATTER THERE IS NO
BALLOT. ONE RAIDO REPORT SUGGESTS THAT CAPITAL WILL BE
KAIROUAN, BUT THIS CONTRARY TO WHAT BOURGUIBA TOLD ME
(SEE TUNIS 206).

3B. ON JAN 13 PRESIDENTIAL CABINET DIRECTOR, HABIB CHATTI, WHO
APPARENTLY DID NOT SIT IN ON HISTORIC MEETING, AND TAHRA BELKHODJA
DEPARTED FOR TRIPOLI. LOCAL PRESS CORRESPONDENTS SEPCULATE THEY
HAVE GONE TO DISCUSS REFERENDUM DELAY. THEY SCHEUDLED SUBSEQUENTLY
TO VISIT ALGIERS AND RABAT TO EXPLAIN MERGER. INTERESTEING NO VISIT
YET ANNOUNCED TO NOUAKCHOTT, WHICH BOURGUIBA INCLUDED IN
HIS MAGHREB CONFEDERATION PLANS AT NON-ALIGNED CONFERENCE.

LARG AMY BE HANDLING MAURETANIAN CONTACT.

4. TUNISIAN REACTION. PUBLIC REACTION OF PRESS AND RADIO HAS PREDICTABLY HAILED EVENT AS HISTORIC, IN KEEPING WITH BOURGUIBAISM AND MAJOR STEP IN BUILDING ARAB UNITY. SOME SMALL POPULAR DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN TUNIS AND ELSEWHERE. THESE APPEAR TO BE PARTY-INSPIRED. WHILE THESE FAVOR UNITY, CHANTS WERE NOT ENTIRELY PRO-BOURGUIBA. ONE UNCONFIRMED REPORT OF ANTI-UNION DEMONSTRATION REPORTED IN TUNIS. REACTION IN SOUTHERN PART OF TUNISIA, WHICH HAS MUCH CLOSER LINKS WITH LIBYA GEOGRAPHICALLY AND BY POPULATION REPORTEDLY HAS BEEN ENTHUSIASTIC AND FAVORABLE. NORTHERN TUNISIANS AFTER ABSORBING SHOCK OF SUDDEN MOVE ARE TAKING MORE SOBER VIEW OF UNION. THEY BELIEVE IT OFFERS OBVIOUS ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES: JOBS, OIL REVENUES, MARKET FOR PRODUCTS, ETC. BUT UNITY ALSO CONTAINS RISKS WHICH MOST EDUCATED TUNISIANS, PARTICULARLY BOURGEOISIE, CAN PERCEIVE. NORTHERNERS HAVE GENERAL DISLIKE FOR LIBYANS AS PEOPLE WHICH NOT MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD SOUTHERN TUNISIANS INCLUDING JERBIANS AS A CLASS. SAHELANS (OF MIDDLE COASTAL BELT), WHO NOW DOMINATE GOT, HAVE MORE TOLERANT VIEW OF LIBYANS OWING TO THEIR OWN STRONG ARABIC AS OPPOSED TO BERBER HERITAGE, BUT NOT DOUBT REGARD THEMSELVES AS SUPERIOR TO LIBYANS. BY AND LARGE, TUNISIAN MAN-IN-STREET REACTION IS THAT IF BOURGUIBA IS NOW FOR UNITY AFTER HAVING OPPOSED HASTY MERGER, THEN IT MUST BE IN TUNISIA'S
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INTEREST SINCE HE KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING. THIS IS NOT UNUSUAL REACTION GIVEN TUNISIA'S HISTORY AND GENERAL APATHY OF POPULACE.

4A. INTERESTING THAT TWELVE LIBERALS INCLUDING THREE FORMER MINDEF (AHMED MESTIRI, BEJI CAID ESSEBSI AND HASSIB BEN AMMAR) AND THREE OTHER FORMER MINISTERS, ISSUED SIGNED DECLARATION TO PRESS EVENING JAN 12 SUPPORTING UNITY ANNOUNCEMENT BUT CITING NEED FOR ESTABLISHING UNITY ON SOLID BASIS SUCH AS CONSTITUTIONAL INSTITUTIONS FOUNDED ON POPULAR PARTICIPATION AND GUARANTEEING LIBERTY AND FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS (COPY TO BE FOLDED). DECLARATION PUBLISHED IN AS SABAGH JAN 13 AND MASMOUDI ALLUDED TO IT AS FAVORABLE SIGN IN LE MONDE INTERVIEW. REACTION AMONG MILITARY, WHICH WILL BE CRUCIAL IN VIEW OF PROPOSAL TO CREATE ONE ARMY AND SUPERIOR NUMBERS OF LIBYAN FORCE, NOT YET KNOWN. FACT THAT FORMER DEFMINIS NOTED ABOVE, WHO HAD GOOD FOLLOWING AMONG OFFICER CORPS, HAVE APPROVED IT IN PRINCIPLE MAY MAKE IT MORE ACCEPTABLE TO TOP OFFICERS. HOWEVER, THERE COULD BE DIVISION OF OPINION IN MILITARY ON THIS QUESTION BETWEEN THOSE IN FAVOR, WHO ARE CONVINCED BOURGUIBA KNOWS WHAT'S BEST, AND THOSE OPPOSED, WHO HAVE LATELY

LOST THEIR CONFIDENCE IN BOURGUIBA'S ABILITY. LATTER
GROUP MAY NOT BE LARGE ENOUGH TO MAKE DIFFERENCE AT THIS
TIME.

5. BOURGUIBA'S REATIONALE. FACT THAT BOURGUIBA MADE
SUDDEN ALXMOST ABOUT-FACE MOVE ON UNITY WITH LIBYA AFTER
HOLDING QADHAFI AT ARM'S LENGTH FOR PAST YEAR IS MAIN
FACET FOR SEPCUALTION AT THIS POINT. THERE HAS BEEN NO OFFICIAL
EXPLANATION FOR MERGER MOVE ASIDE FROM MASMOUDI'S COMMENTS
TO LE MONDE, WHICH WE HAVE NOT YET SEEN. OF COURSE, CASE
CAN BE MADE THAT GOT HAS HAD YEAR OF COOPERATION AND
REFLECTION TO JUDGE POSSIBILITY FOR BRINGING ABOUT VIABLE
MERGER BETWEEN TWO COUNTRIESK , ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF WHICH
COULD BE CONSIDERABLE FOR TUNISIA. ON BAIIS HIS ESTIMATE
OF PRESENT SITUATION, KNOWING THAT QADHAFI IS DISILLUSIONED
WITH REST OF ARAB WORLD, BOURGUIBA MAY HAVE DECIDED IT
WAS OPPORTUNE TIME TO STRIKE A BARGAIN. THIS WOULD
FIX LIBYA'S AND AQADHAFI'S INTEREST ON MERGER WITH
TUNISI AND HASTEN DECLINE OF EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE IN LIBYA,
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WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN CONCERN OF GOT. BOURGUIBA ALSO
MAY FEEL WOMEWHAT ISOLATED AND IGNORED IN ARAB WORLD
AND INTERNATIONALLY BECAUSE TUNISIA HAS NOT REAL WEIGHT IN
MIDDLE EAST EQUATION AND HIS ADVICE NOT BEIGN SOUGHT OR
FOLLOWED AS MUCH AS HE WOULD LIKE. HE MAY HAVE DECIDED
A MERGER WITH LIBYA WITH HIM AS PRESIDENT WOULD ENHANCE
HIS STATURE IN ARAB WORLD, EUROPE AND EKLSEWHERE.

5B. BOURGUIBA ALSO MAY TAKE LONG VIEW THAT QADHAFI WILL BE
PROBLEM FOR TUNISIA FOR SOME TIME TO COME BECAUSE OF HIS
YOUTH AND HOLD ON POWER IN LIBYA. NOT WANTING TO RISK
QADHAFI POWER PLAY AFTER HE IS GONE, HE MAY HAVE DECIDED
TO TAKE ON QADHAFI WHILE HE THOUGH HE COULD HANDLE HIM.
HE MAY THINK QADHAFI IS A MISGUIDED YOUNG LEADER WITH
POTENTIAL WHO UNDER HIS TUTELAGE COULD DEVELOP INTO A

NOTE BY OCT: POUCHED SANAA. NOT PASSED CAIRO.

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O 141800Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4175

USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 4 OF 4 TUNIS 0224

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POSITIVE STATEMEN. QADHAFI'S ANTI-COMMUNISM IS
SILILAR TO BOURGUIBA'S AND THEY ARE BOTH SUSPICIOUS
OF SOVIET EXPANSION IN MIDDLE EAST. BOURGUIBA LOOKING
TOWARD SUCCESHIION MAY SEE ONLY WAY TO NEUTRALIZE QADHAFI
IS TO JOIN HIM AND SEE THAT HE IS DEPRIVED OF MEANS TO
CAUSE TROUBLE. BOURGUIBA'S HANDLING OF HIS OWN REAL OR
IMAGINED RIVALS IN TUNISIA IS WORTH REMEMBERING IN THIS
REGARD. NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS STILL THE POSSIBILITY THAT BOURGUIBA

WAS TALKED INTO SIGNING THE UNITY PROCLAMATION WITHOUT REALIZING FULLY WHAT THE IMPLICATIONS MIGHT BE. SUPPORTING THIS ARE THE SECRECY SURROUNDING THE EVENT, THE PERSONS INVOLVED, THE REPORTED DECLINE IN HIS MENTAL STATE DUE TO FATIGUE AND THE ABSENCE OF THREE OF HIS KEY ADVISORS, NOUIRA, AHBIB BOURGUIBA, JR. AND WASSILA. IF THIS IS TRUE, THEN MASMOUDI HAS TRULY ENGINEERED A COUP.

6. CHANCES OF SUCCESS. EMBASSY TAKES SKEPTICAL VIEW OF CHANCES FOR MERGER AS PROCLAIMED. SOME COMPROMISE FORMULA MAY BE WORKED OUT, INCLUDING POSSIBILITY OF SOME FORM OF ECONOMIC UNIFICATION, BUT THIS IS DIFFICULT TO FORESEE NOW. TWO STATES ARE COMPLEMENTARY IN SENSE THAT TUNISIANS POSSESS MORE SKILLED PEOPLE AND TRAINED CADRE, WHILE LIBYA HAS TREMENDOUS OIL RESOURCES. BUT THERE ARE FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES, INCLUDING NATURES OF RESPECTIVE SOCIETIES, DIFFERENT FORMS OF GOVERNMENT AND DIVERGENT ORIENTATIONS, WHICH MAKE MERGER APPEAR UNREALISTIC. ROAD WILL BE BUMPY AND THERE MAY BE SOME TENSE MOMENTS IN COMING MONTHS AS BOTH SIDES TEST EACH OTHER'S SINCERITY IN THIS VENTURE. IF TUNISIAN MILITARY SHOULD DECIDE MERGER NOT IN TUNISIA'S INTEREST, IT COULD PLAY SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN UNDERMINING MERGER SCHEME. FACT THAT SO FEW PEOPLE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CONSULTED ON THIS PARTICULAR MOVE TOWARDS UNION MAKES IT MORE RISKY THAN IF THERE HAD BEEN BROADER CONSULTATION. A NUMBER OF TUNISIANS ARE NO DOUBT ANXIOUS TO SEE MERGER FAIL FOR PERSONAL POLITICAL REASONS OR BECAUSE OF THE FEAR OF FUTURE UNDER QADHAFI AFTER BOURGUIBA IS GONE. THE FIRST TEST OF THE MERGER'S FRAGILITY MAY COME OVER THE REFERENDUM QUESTION. ONLY TWO HOURS AFTER SIGNING A DOCUMENT FIXING A DATE, BOURGUIBA SUGGESTED IT MIGHT BE NECESSARY TO DELAY THE DATE AND OFFERED TUNISIA'S INDEPENDENCE

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DAY AS NEW DATE. QADHAFI'S BEHAVIOR SO FAR WOULD NOT INDICATE HE IS LIKELY TO BE PLEASED BY THIS RENEGING. IT MAY BE A BOURGUIBA TEST TO SEE HOW FLEXIBLE AND COOPERATIVE QADHAFI WILL BE IN THE SEARCH FOR A FORMULA FOR UNION.

7. EFFECT ON U.S. FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE, WE ADVOCATE NO CHANGE IN US RELATIONSHIP WITH TUNISIA. WE BELIEVE ANY USG ACTION WHICH SEEKS TO PENALIZE TUNISIA WOULD RUN COUNTER TO US INTERESTS. MERGER SCHEME IS LIKELY TO COLLAPSE ON ITS OWN, AND ANYTHING WHICH WEAKENS TUNISIA AT THIS JUNCTURE WOULD ONLY RISK STRENGTHENING HAND OF LIBYANS AND LIBYAN SUPPORTERS. WE BELIEVE OUR PUBLIC POSITION SHOULD BE THAT FEDERATION PROPOSAL IS MATTER BETWEEN TUNISIAN AND LIBYANS, AND USG CONTEMPLATES NO CHANGES IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH TUNISIA.

SEELYE

NOTE BY OCT: POUCHED SANAA. NOT PASSED CAIRO.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

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